

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, Catholics have a sacrament, the sacrament of penance, which they call reconciliation. It is a time when you revisit your own life to take a close look at how your daily actions square with what you believe. As a Catholic, looking at this budget, I cannot square the moral values of our country, opportunity, equality and justice, with the practical impact that this budget proposal will have on the lives of working American families.

This year, thanks to President Bush's tax-cutting program, the U.S. Government will deliver up to \$106 billion to the multiple bank accounts of some of the wealthiest Americans. This government program to help wealthy Americans spend more money now forces a false crunch on our resources, a \$50 billion cut that Republicans believe should come from Medicaid, food stamps, and student loans. Who will feel the impact of these cuts? Well, almost 60 percent of all people in nursing homes who are on Medicaid, and one-third of all babies who are born on Medicaid, and 8 million Americans with disabilities who depend on Medicaid, and 36 million Americans who have to worry about going hungry.

How do we, as a Congress, reconcile the fact that these cuts will disproportionately affect low-income Americans, the elderly, and the poor? The answer is we should not reconcile ourselves to such an action, not for 1 minute, not for a nanosecond. If we are going to dramatically change for the worse the lives of millions of children and families and senior citizens across the country, it had better be because we had to, not because we chose to. And there is no doubt that Republicans have now chosen to rob the poor to maintain and create new tax breaks for the rich.

We are not simply robbing the poor of resources. The proposed cuts are robbing the poor of opportunity. The reconciliation budget targets programs that work to bridge the gap between rich and poor, Medicaid, food stamps, and student loans, that strive to even the playing field for all American families.

Eight weeks ago, across the United States, Americans saw the faces of other Americans staring up at them from television screens scratching out desperate signs on rooftops. Help us, the signs said. Grandmothers, brothers, nieces, nephews, newborns, the faces of families who could be our families, neighbors who could be our neighbors, but desperate, alone, and calling out to the world to see. Across the country, Americans answered with one voice: we are better than this. This is wrong. This is immoral. This must not be allowed to continue. We must take care of our own. It is our responsibility. It is our duty. It is who we are as a people.

As a country, we saw that 100,000 people were trapped in New Orleans because they did not have automobiles to escape the flood waters. We found that 50 percent of all children in Louisiana

live in poverty. In response to this national revelation, Republicans have revisited our national budget and made a decision to cut programs from the poorest of the poor while protecting a new tax cut giveaway to the richest of the rich. Instead of limiting these tax cuts to millionaires, the Republicans have decided to rebuild New Orleans on the backs of the poorest people from the rest of the country.

This is a moral question, not a budget matter. The Republicans are building the high levees around their threatened tax cuts, while letting the flood swamp the programs that matter for the rest of Americans. This is what the debate is really all about. It is about our values as a Nation and how they are reflected in how we govern, how America should treat its neighbors, our fellow Americans, who by an accident of birth came into this world unable to see or who were born into a family without the means to put food on the table, or who had the misfortune to develop Alzheimer's. Should we let them starve? Should we tell their children they will never go to college because their parents cannot pay the tuition? Shall we turn them away from the hospitals because they cannot afford the care and do not have the insurance? Or should we as a country decide that in this land of plenty no one should go without basic human dignity?

As a Catholic, I was brought up to believe that character is judged by how we treat the least amongst us. This budget does not pass that test, and my hope is that tomorrow we as a Congress will rise up to defeat it.

Poverty is on the rise in our country, 37 million Americans are now in poverty.

A family of two in poverty—a single mother with her child—is living on \$1,069 a month.

About 14 million Americans are living on half of poverty. A single mother with her child living at half of poverty is trying to survive on \$535 a month.

That is two people living on \$123.37 a week.

And each day in America 2,385 more babies are born into poverty.

The Republicans will say that society has little obligation to help the poor because they fail to take personal responsibility for their lives.

The United States has highest GDP in the world. We are first in military technology; first in military exports; first in Gross Domestic Product; first in the number of millionaires and billionaires; and first in health technology. But we rank 12th in living standards among our poorest one-fifth; 13th in the gap between rich and poor; 14th in efforts to lift children out of poverty; 18th in the percent of children in poverty; and 37th in the health status of our citizens.

We should be working to close these gaps and ensure that all Americans have a fair chance at life and are treated with basic human dignity.

Instead, this reconciliation plan will take away food, health care, education and the ability to live in dignity in old age from people who have no other options. This budget will proliferate existing inequalities.

I simply cannot reconcile this budget with my values because this budget does not reflect who we are as a nation and what we believe our responsibility is to other Americans.

We will be judged by how we take care of the least of our people.

We will be judged by our decision to turn our backs on those Americans who were driven to cry out HELP—We are your neighbors, your grandmothers, your children.

I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on this shortsighted, fiscally irresponsible and immoral budget.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMAN of New York). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MEEHAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MEEHAN addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. HERSETH addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

REPUBLICANS WORKING HARD TO KEEP DEFICIT SPENDING UNDER CONTROL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to listen to people come up and talk and talk and demagogue that, gee, the Republicans are letting the deficit grow so big, when the people that are talking about it keep promoting one giveaway after another giveaway after another giveaway. It seems to some of us that we spend half our time trying to fight off the incredible giveaway and deficit spending of those who are accusing the Republicans of letting the deficit get too big.

You bet, it is too big for me. I do not like it. I do not want to saddle my children with indebtedness, so we are working and fighting to keep some of those who are complaining across the aisle from giving away even more. So thank goodness there are some conservatives who are trying to keep the deficit down. Thank goodness we are making headway. Thank goodness the deficit is going to be \$200 billion less than what was expected. We are making progress.

I cannot apologize for having tax cuts that go to those who pay taxes, because to give tax cuts to those who do not pay taxes is not a tax cut, it is a giveaway, yet another giveaway. After 9/11 we should have had another 1929-type depression, it was that devastating to this country. Yet because we had a President who pushed forward with a tax cut to those who pay taxes, we ended up having a mild recession and came charging back, as we continue to do.

So in closing, it just seems to me that people who are pushing for giveaway after giveaway, or runaway spending, and who then come in and complain about the deficit is a bit, it seems to me, like a herd of cattle standing around a lake complaining that the water does not taste all that fresh. For those of us who are fish that are trying to have clean water, it is just a little difficult to have people plopping stuff in the water that is just tough to swallow.

WTO NEGOTIATIONS ON U.S. AGRICULTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, at the present time we are conducting some talks, WTO negotiations, involving the European Union. I would like to call attention to some figures that I think most people are not totally aware of.

First of all, if you compare the United States economy with the European Union, the United States economy is \$11.7 trillion annually and the European Union is \$9.4 trillion. So they are pretty comparable. The import tariffs we have on goods coming from the European Union into the U.S. are 12 percent, and tariffs on U.S. goods going into the European Union are 30 percent.

So we have comparable economies and yet a tremendous disparity in tariffs. This led to an agricultural trade deficit of minus \$6.3 billion last year, which was the biggest deficit that we had with any entity that we were trading with for agriculture.

On export subsidies, the European Union provides \$3 billion and we provide \$31.5 million, so they are roughly 100 to 1 on money they spend on subsidizing their exports to other countries. As far as farm subsidies per acre are concerned, the United States subsidizes agriculture at \$38 per acre with the European Union at \$295 an acre. So this is a tremendous discrepancy.

One other set of data I wish to point out is that we have had two cases of BSE, or mad cow disease, in the United States. The European Union has had 189,102 in the European Union in the last 10, 15 years. Yet the European Union excludes our exports of beef into the European Union, our pork, our genetically modified crops, such as corn, and also poultry. So we are really having a very difficult time with the European Union when you look at all these figures.

Currently, we are having some preliminary WTO talks where we are looking at some ways to try to fix world trade, and I want to point out a couple of things.

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First of all, we are proposing that the United States reduce farm subsidies 60 percent, which would mean that we

would drop our subsidies from \$19 billion a year to roughly \$17.5 billion a year, and at the same time we are proposing that the European Union reduce agricultural subsidies to 83 percent, which would be a decrease from \$80 billion down to \$15 billion. That is a big drop, but still the European Union would be subsidizing double what the United States does. The European Union has rejected this offer at the present time.

I think it is important that people realize what happens in the next round of WTO talks will have great implications for the next farm bill which will be written in 2007 and go into effect in 2008. We are apt to see a move toward conservation types of payments, away from traditional types of payment.

We will have to be concerned about developing countries like Brazil. Brazil has land valued at \$250 to \$500 an acre. They have enough rain and topsoil to produce two crops a year. Their labor is 50 cents an hour. They can pretty well bury us if we do not provide some subsidy for our agriculture.

Lastly, I would like to issue a warning. We saw what happened to our petroleum industry. We found we could buy a barrel of oil from OPEC a few years ago for \$10 a barrel. We began to get more and more from OPEC. Finally, we are pretty well dependent on foreign sources of oil. We cannot afford to let this happen to our agricultural economy. Certainly changes are in order, but I think it is important we proceed cautiously because we do not lose our food supply to foreign sources, which would be even more devastating than losing our oil supply to sources abroad.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMAN of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. Speaker, I am joined by my colleagues this evening to talk about Children's Health Month. It is very important for all families in our Nation, and certainly an issue that concerns all of us on both sides of the aisle.

While the rhetoric of the House often echoes through these walls about cuts and people being harmed, it seems to me that is the only part of the discussion that we are taking away. Little offers are made in terms of what is needed.

What we do often hear is discussions of who is paying. Should individuals pay, insurance companies be taxed more, businesses be given tax cuts, perhaps health savings accounts, association health plans, or just have the Federal Government take over? But this should not just be an issue of who is paying, for although that is important, and how much we are paying is impor-

tant, really much of this comes down to what we need to have is an open discussion of what we are paying for.

According to the National Center of Health Statistics, 83 percent of children in this country under 18 years of age have excellent to very good health. That is good news.

Now 17 percent of America's children are in less than favorable health, either to mild or severe levels. We have to make sure we do all we can to help these children have a better health future and help the rest remain healthy. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 6.3 million uninsured children, over two-thirds of all uninsured children in America, are currently eligible either for Medicaid or for the State health insurance programs, but they are not enrolled. There are many opportunities. I know the State of Pennsylvania, where I represent the 18th Congressional District, really has very good services and insurance for children of a low income level but we need to make sure that we expand enrollment and get those kids beyond. For those who are uninsured or underinsured but beyond the level of Medicaid, there are several things that we should be looking at to make sure that they get the health care they need to maintain their health to prevent higher expenses for emergency care.

But what this means is not just more discussions on we are cutting money out of Medicaid or other aspects. Look at what has happened to the growth of Medicaid. In 1995, and this is for all ages, Medicaid spent \$150 billion. We are now up to \$300 billion. About half of Americans are covered by some level of Federal insurance or health care. But the system is growing, and the concern is it is growing out of control.

While we are looking at such things as how do we pay for Hurricane Katrina's outcome in this devastated gulf region, how do we take care of so many needs, is it fair to just continue to say to the American people we are going to continue to spend more without finding ways of eliminating waste and fraud and abuse?

Let me give an example. The New York Times wrote recently about an amount of some \$4.4 billion in Medicaid fraud in that State. One dentist billed for over 980 procedures in one day. Clearly these were patients that were actually being seen. Another company used van rides for supposedly disabled people, billing those rides to the government. But these people when followed by a reporter clearly were not disabled. They walked around just fine. There is example after example after example.

I believe the American taxpayer wants to make sure that this waste, this fraud, this abuse is removed from the health care system. But it is not just a matter of that. When it comes to our children, we also have to make sure the system works with these programs in ways that optimize the health and outcome.